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Art, Nature and Women in Sara Baume's *A Line Made by Walking*

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Resumo [na lingua en que se vai redactar o TFG; entre 1000 e 2000 caracteres]:

Sara Baume is probably one of the most promising contemporary Irish writers. She is a recent instance of Irish women's brilliant contribution to the history of Irish literature. Baume has already published two acclaimed novels as well as several short stories in the most prestigious literary magazines. Women, outcasts, nature and animals feature recurrently in her fiction. The present contribution intends to study her second novel, *A Line Made By Walking* (2017), in which the author narrates the story of a young woman suffering from depression who retires to her grandmother's house in the middle of nature. In this context, the protagonist, who is also an aspiring artist, pays particular attention to the natural world that surrounds her, and begins a most surprising project: taking photos of dead animals.

Our study analyses the topics in Baume's novel as well as the experimental formal features of her work, and we combine a gender approach with the teachings of ecocriticism, ecofeminism and animal studies.

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Introduction

The natural world has most frequently been represented by literature, and therefore its culture, as a mere setting, an element sans agency whose worth is determined by us, by either its beauty or its economic value. The consequences of this mindset need not be stated, as they are obvious and our disregard of the importance of nature for our lives has been affecting us personally and collectively for some time now. Similarly, nonhuman animals' relevance in literature has been historically relegated to a symbolic function, ignoring the real beings behind the symbols. Both nature and nonhuman animals have been and continue to be oppressed and abused by the human species and the literary tradition has contributed to it with, fortunately enough, some exceptions.

Environmental studies have emerged as a critique against this stance and this is the reason why ecocritics focus on the importance of producing literary works that confront and lead their readers to reflect on the degradation of the planet, the necessity of creating a literature to guide us toward an increasing awareness of the impact of our actions in the natural world. As the environmental crisis continues to worsen, we are in need of writers that make us question our conception of nature and nonhuman animals. Such an author is the Irish writer Sara Baume that we study in this work.

The author of *A Line Made by Walking* is a contemporary Irish artist born to an Irish mother and an English father. Baume is an experimental and cross-media creator; she has studied fine arts and holds a MA in creative writing. *Spill Simmer Falter Wither* (2015), Baume's debut novel, shares some similarities with *A Line Made by Walking* (2017), her latest work; both stories are set in rural areas and their protagonists are solitary characters whose troubled identities are slowly revealed. Baume's first novel

received plenty of critical praise along with several awards including the 2015 Rooney Prize for Irish Literature and the 2015 Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize. She has been awarded as well the Davy Byrnes Short Story Award for her short story "Solesearcher1" and the 2015 Hennessy New Irish Writing Award, among others.

Animals, the natural world, women and loneliness are prominent elements in Baume's stories and *A Line Made by Walking* is an example of it. Her latest novel combines pictures, Baume's vast knowledge of art and her peculiar rendering of the natural world.

I intend to study *A Line Made by Walking* from an ecocritical and ecofeminist perspective. The aim of this dissertation is to analyse to which extent some of the most relevant notions in ecocriticism and ecofeminism can be applied to Baume's work.

This analysis was realised with the aid, mainly, of the works by ecofeminists Carol J. Adams, Josephine Donovan and Marti Kheel as well as the theories of Greg Garrard and Paul Waldau, and Tim Wenzell's analysis of nature in Irish literature. I am indebted as well to the anthology edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm –*The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*–, Ken Hiltner's compilation of essays –*Ecocriticism: The Essential Reader*–, and the studies of Margarita Estévez-Saá and María Jesús Lorenzo-Modia, Eóin Flannery, Lori Gruen, Glen A. Love, and Kate Soper.

In the first section of this dissertation I set out to explain the notions that are going to be used for the analysis of the novel. These concepts will be related to their theoretical framework in order to provide a general review of the critical apparatus. I begin with a brief description of the history of ecocriticism and ecofeminist studies in order to account for the transformation and evolution of ecocriticism, and I move on to elaborate on the importance of ecocritic studies and its aims, focusing on the dualisms that it wants to discard. Next, I focus on the notion of ecofeminism, both its principles and the

controversy that surrounds it, paying special attention to those ecofeminists who defend an ethics of care.

In the second part of my work I reflect briefly on the situation of nature in the specific case of Ireland and of Irish literature so as to better understand the context of *A Line Made by Walking.* This second section applies all these notions and ideas to the study and interpretation of Baume's novel, justifying the analysis with instances of relevant passages from said novel. I provide an analysis of the representation of nature, focusing on the contrast between urban and rural life and the instances of anthropocentrism that can be found. Additionally, I examine the relation between the protagonist and nonhuman animals in terms of the feminist tradition of eco-caring and veganism. This section finishes with an evaluation of the protagonist's development through the story.

In this work, I have opted for referring to nonhuman animals by the pronouns *who* instead *which*, and *they* instead of *it* unless gender is known.

I. Ecocriticism and Ecofeminism

Ecocriticism has emerged as a means to draw attention towards environmental concerns and the representation of nature in literature. It was born out of necessity due to, as Cheryll Glotfelty has called it, "the troubling awareness that have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support systems" (123). Its raison d'être is similar to those of feminist or black studies, to fulfil a necessity and to help raise awareness and conscience about an issue that has been ignored or, at the very least, glazed over by most, for centuries. Ecocriticism emphasises how important is the connection between human beings and the natural world, and how the issue of environmental destruction is directly linked to the disconnection between both (Thomas K. Dean 5).

In basic terms, ecocriticism has been defined as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Cheryll Glotfelty 122). Glotfelty can be considered one of the first ecocritics, her work being pioneer in this field. This brief description of ecocriticism, although it may appear simple, actually disguises a discipline that is complex, broad, and despite its relative newness, somewhat controversial. The term "ecocriticism" was coined by William Rueckert in 1978, with the publication of his work *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism,* and it was Glotfelty who "revived the term" in order to "refer to the diffuse critical field that heretofore had been known as 'the study of nature writing'" (Branch and O'Grady 1)

Brief History of Environmental Studies

However, before Glotfelty and many other relevant figures who have helped to shape environmental studies, many literary critics confer some recognition to predecessors such as Romantic artists (romantic ecology) and their homage to nature, the pastoral tradition or nature writing.

Ecocriticism, despite being a young discipline, has already undergone a series of transformations and we can currently speak of two waves, as assigned by Lawrence Buell (Hiltner 131) that differed in their approach to nature and how its representation in literature should be treated. First wave ecocritics, who date from the 1990's, focused on the Romantics; they were "primarily interested in wilderness and other rural locales, which their texts celebrated" (Hiltner 2). Wilderness is a central notion for green studies as it represents "nature in a state uncontaminated by civilisation" and "a place for the reinvigoration of those tired of the moral and material pollution of the city" (Greg Garrard 59) and we will see its importance when commenting on Baume's *A Line Made By Walking* in the second section.

Some ecocritics have warned about the dangers of an ecocritical approach based on a romantic ideology since it may lead to the opposite effect of what ecocriticism is actually trying to achieve. Kate Soper, for instance, reflects on this double-faced approach since it is often employed as a "cover for the continued exploitation of nature" ("The Idea of Nature" 123) and she illustrates her point with the example of those who profit economically from romanticizing nature.

In opposition to those ecocritics, Hiltner goes on saying that second wave ecocritics are "careful not to overly romanticize wilderness" and "more likely to direct themselves to sites of environmental devastation and texts that do the same" (131). The latter

ecocritics have been paying special attention to the connection between nature and many other relevant contemporary issues such as race, gender or class. As Hiltner states, ecocriticism "is poised to have real cultural and political relevance in the twenty-first century" (131), arguing about the importance of analysing those issues from an ecocritical point of view. Therefore, as can be seen, the current wave of thought has moved towards environmental justice, with a more political and activist purpose, rather than limiting itself to the mere exercise of romanticising nature.

The Importance of Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism aims to reach beyond the scope of literary theory and the academic world and it "begins from the conviction that the arts of imagination and study thereof [...] can contribute significantly to the understanding of environmental problems" (Buell et al. 418). Ecocritics stress the necessity of using what Christopher Cokinos calls "ecocritical lenses" in order to "seriously call into question the various canons we have received as "given" and which continue to be taught as though nonhuman nature and the human place within it didn't matter" (3). According to Cokinos, ecocriticism should strive for the renovation of "the entire range of canons" (3). While literary scholars cannot resolve the damage inflicted on the planet, Glotfelty argues that ecocriticism should play an important role in raising awareness about these concerns (126). In this line, Glen A. Love contends that "the more important function of literature today is to redirect human consciousness to a full consideration of its place in a threatened natural world" (237) and he adds:

> Why does nature writing, literature of place, regional writing, poetry of nature, flourish now – even as it is ignored or denigrated by most contemporary criticism? Because of a

> widely shared sense – outside the literary establishment – that the current ideology which separates human beings from their environment is demonstrably and dangerously reductionist. Because the natural world is indubitably real and beautiful and significant. (237)

Cheryll Glotfelty argued back in 1996 that literary studies had remained unperturbed by environmental concerns, remarking that "there have been no journals, no jargon, no jobs, no professional societies or discussion groups, and no conferences on literature and the environment" (121). Glen A. Love, similarly warned about the complete disregard for nature at the time, "a diminished environment is, for the present, a postponable worry". In general terms, we can barely speak of a clear significant change in our society since these statements, written in the 1990s, if we consider that climate change is still believed by some to be a hoax. We still encounter ruthless businessmen and politicians who profit from this situation, and who manipulate and try to prove that there are not any immediate issues that need to be addressed so that they can continue to exploit natural resources. Notwithstanding, it is also true that in the last years we have seen a certain improvement since, as Greg Garrard declares, "political and consumer pressures wielded by environmentalists are responsible for many concrete improvements" (19). In fact, more people are starting to realize the alarming reality of the environmental crisis and are developing a lifestyle that is much more respectful to the world and all its creatures. Big companies, however, might take advantage and find in ecological concern, since it has become fashionable, an opportunity for economic gain without sustaining any real positive impact on nature.

Ecocriticism has been undermined from the beginning, a fact that is at par with the underestimation, and even contempt, for environmental issues and all things nature-related. It starts with its designation since, as Glen A. Love declares, ecocriticism "is commonly assigned to some category such as "nature writing" or "regionalism", or "interdisciplinary studies", obscure pigeonholes whose very titles have seemed to

announce their insignificance" (228). The fact that ecocritical studies were not referred to by an established and consistent term was troublesome, as it was harder to take into account its actual impact and presence (Glotfelty 121). William Howarth contends that "classic disciplines are suspicious of new approaches and will dismiss them as flimsy" and that "literary theorists will regard ecocriticism as 'insufficiently problematic' if their interests do not clearly match current ideological fashion. An ethical politics is welcome, yet not if it focuses on such nonhuman topics as scenery, animals or landfill dumps" (77).

Some literary critics, such as Stephanie Sarver, have shared some, perhaps, controversial opinions about ecocritical studies, which are at the same time extremely insightful and rather accurate. Sarver opposed the creation of the term 'ecocriticism', reasoning that ecocritical studies were, in fact, "not united by a theory, but by a focus: the environment" (10), and she maintains that ecocriticism needs from different theories (feminism, Marxism, post-structuralism, etc.) so as to be able to analyze nature in texts, which would mean that ecocritical studies "reflect not the science of ecology, but a broad-based environmentalist sensibility" (10). Sarver urges critics to establish a theory before coining "a vague and somewhat misleading name" (10).

Glotfelty's first definition of ecocriticism had already announced the discipline's broadness and interdisciplinary nature. Glotfelty adds that it "takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies" (122) and these approaches can and should come from all kinds of perspectives since, as Thomas K. Dean explains, "in order to understand the connectedness of all things [...] one must reconnect the disciplines that have become sundered through over-specialization" (5). Dean blames the environmental crisis on the development of technology, but also on humans' failure to capture the whole picture,

bringing up instead a “wholistic view of the universe”, which does admit this connection by which “the integrity of all things” is valued (6).

One of the main features of ecocritical studies is its interdisciplinarity; in fact, all critics seem to agree on the point that ecocriticism must be approached from a variety of perspectives. Stan Tag holds that “Just as a healthy ecosystem depends upon a diversity of plant and animal life, healthy ecocriticism depends upon a diversity of viewpoints and perspectives” (15)

The broadness of the discipline has been precisely one of the aspects that have rendered it vulnerable to critiques; however, Thomas K. Dean counterattacks these statements arguing that this is precisely what ecocriticism “seeks to heal”, the disconnections that “particularized critical approaches” have created (6).

Kent Ryden concludes that adopting an interdisciplinary method allows ecocritics to “[recontextualise] literature in the physical, grounded circumstances of life and thought and action, circumstances of the sort that generate literature in the first place” (9), remarking the idea that ecocriticism should aim to establish a connection between nature and literature, that is, between nature and culture.

Problematic Dualisms: Nature vs. Culture, or the Cultural Construction of Nature

It is this very notion that has been very controversial for ecocritics as they struggled to reconcile the nature and culture dichotomy, one of the roots of our environmental crisis. It was not until the decade of 1990 that the first ecocritics began to build a connection

between nature and culture, which marked the starting point of a theory that combined both subjects (Hiltner 2). As William Howarth argues "connecting science and literature is difficult, for their cultures have grown widely apart" (76). However, one of the facts on which all ecocritics seem to agree is "the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and being affected by it" (Glotfelty 122). The undervaluation of nature is blatantly obvious considering its automatic dismissal in favour of culture, as Love declares, "nature is dull and uninteresting while society is sophisticated and interesting" (230). Love argues that the same happens when culture and nature come together, "literature in which nature plays a significant role is, by definition, irrelevant and inconsequential" (230).

Moreover, culture and reason are conceived as being superior to nature, and the domination of the former over the latter has become inherent to Western cultural and philosophical tradition. As Greg Garrard remarks "reason became the means to achieving total mastery over nature, now conceived as an enormous, soulless mechanism that worked according to knowable natural laws" (62) and we have interiorized that "nature is only the raw material of culture, appropriated, preserved, enslaved, exalted, or otherwise made flexible for disposal by culture in the logic of capitalist colonialism" (Donna Haraway 147)

The notion of nature is one that must be handled carefully. It has been repeatedly employed throughout history with political purposes, often in order to justify the discrimination of certain groups (Soper, "The Idea of Nature" 123). We decide what is natural and what is not, according to our standards of normal, and thus, we have seen the naturalization of certain attitudes driven by racism, sexism, homophobia, speciesism, etc., which is deeply related to the construction of the 'other'; 'other' being that which is not us, which is not typical for us and to whom we assign a series of

features and labels to force them to fit into the ideas we have of them, often in order to control them. We have done the same with nature; as Eóin Flannery argues, "under patriarchal capitalism 'woman' and 'nature' have been simultaneously 'othered' and oppressed" (59) and regarding our preconceived ideas of nature Soper argues that:

> It is true that we can make no distinction between the 'reality' of nature and its cultural representation that is not itself conceptual, but it does not justify the conclusion that there is no ontological distinction between the ideas we have of nature and that which the ideas are about: that since nature is only signified in human discourse, inverted commas 'nature' is nature, and we should therefore remove the inverted commas. ("The Idea of Nature" 124)

In relation to Soper's statement, we must mention that some ecocritics support a view of nature that has been occasionally called 'Heideggerian ecophilosophy' after philosopher Martin Heidegger, which supports that "responsible humans have an implicit duty to let things disclose themselves in their own inimitable way, rather than forcing them into meanings and identities that suit their own instrumental values" (Garrard 31).

Ecocentrism and/or Anthropocentrism

> "The tug of eco-consciousness as a corrective to ego-consciousness" (Love 233)

Interwoven with the notions of nature and culture, we identify another dualism which supports either a nature-centred perspective, or a human-centred one, respectively. By this 'human-centred perspective', however, we must not understand just one point of view, but rather a great number of cultural differences hidden behind the term 'human' (Plumwood 11). Plumwood asserts the importance of eliminating "arrogant ethnocentrism" from ecocriticism since "Accounts of generalised 'patriarchy' as the villain behind the ecological crisis implicitly assume that western culture is human culture" (11).

There are different attitudes toward the natural world, mainly based on cultural and religious premises. According to Garrard, Eastern philosophy has, in general, been closer to nature and even ecocriticism "has proceeded from, and fed back into related belief systems derived from Eastern religions" (22).

In opposition, Western culture has always had an anthropocentric stance and so, following this tradition, many environmentalists made a defence of nature from a functional perspective, meaning that their preoccupation for the destruction of Earth was strictly related to their preoccupation for the human race (Greg Garrard 21). In opposition to this perspective, Sueellen Campbell states that "the most important challenge to traditional hierarchies in ecology is the concept of biocentrism –the conviction that humans are neither better nor worse than other creatures but equal to everything else in the natural world" (128), which is a position that has been widely adopted by ecologists and receives the name of "deep ecology", as coined by philosopher Arna Naess.

Glen A. Love, whose beliefs situate him ideologically close to this group, stated that "Without in any way discounting the issues to which we have given first priority, however, there will clearly come a time, and soon, when we will be forced to recognize that human domination [...] of the biosphere is the overriding problem" (227). Love goes on saying that

> we must also recognize [...] our discipline's limited humanistic vision, our narrowly anthropocentric view of what is consequential in life [...] In our thinking, the challenge that faces us in these terms is to outgrow our notion that human beings are so special that the earth exists for our comfort and disposal alone. (229)

The fact that we believe that the earth is ours and that we have the right to exploit and damage it is evidenced by everyday choices that we make, whether they are conscious

or not, without considering their impact on nature or on the well-being of non-human animals. It is not particularly surprising considering that more often than not, we do not even take into account the repercussions of our actions for other human beings.

In conclusion, we are limited and to some extent inevitably anchored by anthropomorphism. Some ecocritics defend the possibility of transcending, going beyond anthropomorphic stances and to adopt biocentric points of view; others claim that we could, at least, acknowledge our anthropomorphic bias and develop its potential for adopting a broader and more ethical view of the relationship between humans and the environment.

Ecofeminism

Stephanie Sarver asserted that in order to gain relevance, ecocritics should "introduce environmental matters into more main-stream literary discussions that center on such issues as gender, sexuality, politics, ethnicity, and nationalism" (10) and she suggests expanding environmental studies to the analysis of "the nature inherent in humans and in settings in which humans figure prominently: in our dooryards, cities, and farms" (10). In conclusion, Sarver favours an approach that "demonstrates that environmental issues are human issues" (10).

This statement was supported as well by Mark Schlenz, who explains that "issues of race, class, and gender inevitably intersect in complex and multi-faceted ways with issues of natural resource exploitation and conservation" (12). This is certainly the course to which many ecocritics have been partial in the most recent years; following this path, ecofeminism arises, by positing that the degradation of the ecosystem was

clearly related to "a specific androcentric system of dominance" (Estévez-Saá and Lorenzo-Modia 3).

Ecofeminism's roots are traceable as far as to the 1970s, appearing with the second wave of feminism, stimulated by the 1960s activist movements for peace (Adams and Gruen 9) and by "a growing sense of discontent with what was perceived as gender blindness and sexism in other environmental groups" (Phillips and Rumens 3). By that time, feminists were already establishing a connection between the exploitation of both women and non-human animals. The ecofeminist movement seems to be, from the very beginning, closely attached to the defence of non-human animals, because as Paul Waldau (260) indicates, there is an intrinsic relation between the violence applied to non-human animals and human animals by other humans. In *Animal Studies, an Introduction*, Waldau refers to the "interlocking oppressions" (260), which denounce that "harms to one group of living beings can foster, even facilitate, other forms of oppression against the same beings or others". Waldau refers to historian Keith Thomas, who contends that past insight, particularly from the Western culture, had already considered that harming nonhuman animals would lead to violence against human beings. However, Thomas reflects on this and states that "this view did not originally reflect any particular concern for animals; on the contrary, moralists normally condemned the ill-treatment of beasts because they thought it had a brutalizing effect on human character and made men cruel to each other" (qtd. in *Animal Studies: an Introduction* 261). While this statement is not true for the whole of the Western culture, this sort of reasoning is not surprising if we take into account Western anthropocentrism. Nevertheless, many intellectuals disagree with this logic holding that harming animals would be immoral even if it did not lead to eventual violence against humans.

Thus, ecofeminism is, fundamentally, concerned with the intersection in which the natural world and women meet; however, as an interdisciplinary and hands-on theory, it is concerned with "the comparable degradation, subjection, and exploitation of women, nature, non-human animals, and other marginalized social groups" (Estévez-Saá and Lorenzo-Modia 2) produced by "sexism, heteronormativity, racism, colonialism and ableism" (Adams and Gruen 1) so that "analysing the ways these forces intersect can produce less violent, more just practices" (1).

Val Plumwood has mentioned a series of assumptions regarding the relation of women and nature: that women are connected to nature and men to reason, that "the sphere of women and nature" is inferior to "the sphere of reason, humanity and culture" and the final assumption is that these sets oppose each other (33).

The association of women with nature has long been argued and countered by ecofeminism, but it is true that early ecofeminists did not separate one from the other and wanted to "reconsider and reassess a reverence and respect for nature and for women that [...] had been lost" (Estévez-Saá and Lorenzo-Modia 4). According to Estévez-Saá and Lorenzo-Modia, some early ecofeminists blamed the commencement of the degradation of both women and nature on either the "scientific revolution" or on "patriarchal societies that substituted previous matriarchal cultures, and the replacement of those goddess religions that regarded the earth and women as sacred, by patriarchal male deities who opted for the domination of both nature and women" (4). Ecofeminists have been combating the inherent association of women with nature and now it is a notion that is widely opposed, since dualisms such as nature/culture and woman/man were responsible for the oppression and disconnection between humans and nature (Adams and Gruen 3). As Mary Phillips and Nick Rumens express:

> The feminine, women, nature and other subordinated groups are deemed not to possess attributes such as rationality and autonomy which are associated with the dominant terms in these dualisms, and they are therefore 'othered' to confirm and justify their exclusion. They are considered as less than human, or non-human, or, at best, an inferior copy. (2)

Phillips and Rumens hold that, as happened with nature, women too have been constructed as the 'other', and Plumwood adds:

> The more highly valued side (males, humans) is construed as alien to and of a different nature or order of being from the 'lower', inferiorised side (women and nature) and each is treated as lacking in qualities, which make possible overlap, kinship or continuity. The nature of each is constructed in polarised ways by the exclusion of qualities shared with the other; the dominant side is taken as primary, the subordinated side is defined in relation to it. Thus woman is constructed as the other, as the exception, the aberration or the subsumed, and man treated as the primary model. (32)

Carolyn Merchant's work on the analysis of the relationship between nature and women was groundbreaking for ecofeminism, reprehending the misconception about the identification of nature as a female organism "who provided for the needs of mankind in an ordered, planned universe" and, simultaneously, "wild and uncontrollable [...] that could render violence, storms, droughts, and general chaos" (10). As Soper argues, the feminization of nature was also brought about due to its conception "as the land or earth which is tamed and tilled in agriculture" and the allegory of nature as "a powerful maternal force, the womb of all human production" ("Naturalized Woman and Feminized Nature" 141). Nature has been assigned sexual connotations; it is according to Soper, "a source of erotic delight, and sometimes of overwhelming provocation to her masculine voyeur-violator" (141), which derives in the perturbing implication of nature as a mother, a virgin and the object of sexual desire (142).

It is due to women's reproductive abilities and their nurturing responsibilities that they "stay closer to nature because of their limited and merely preparatory function as 'producers' of the cultural" (Soper, "Naturalized Woman and Feminized Nature" 140).

With this statement, Soper identifies and opposes 'reproduction' to 'production' as a sort of analogy for 'women' and 'men', and 'nature' and 'culture'. About this, she adds, that this opposition leads us to "suppose that 'production' proceeds without reliance on nature, when in fact any form of human creativity involves a utilization and transformation of natural resources" and furthermore, that "it presents 'reproduction' as if it were unaffected by cultural mediation" ("Naturalized Woman and Feminized Nature" 140).

Val Plumwood (1993), however, warns against generalizing the association of women and nature because it is not "the entire basis and source of women's oppression [...] since women often stand in relatively powerless positions even in cultures which have not made the connection of women to nature or which have a different set of genderised dichotomies" (11). What is universally shared is the fact that "environmental problems [...] tend to affect women and children earlier and more directly, but also in different ways" (Estévez-Saá and Lorenzo-Modia 1). In relation to this, the United Nations has called for the necessity of "gender sensitive responses to the effects of climate change" and "involving women as agents of change in responses".

As happened with ecocriticism, ecofeminism was similarly criticised by feminists for its broadness, discriminated against for its determination to cover a great number of issues (Adams and Gruen 23). As Phillips and Rumens express, other critiques made against ecofeminism were the already mentioned claims that ecofeminists defended "women's special affinity with and closeness to nature based in biologically determined and embodied experiences of, for example, childbirth and menstruation", but also that it "ignored the complexity of women's experiences which are mediated by intersections of class, ethnicity, sexuality and able-bodiedness" (4), especially, that ecofeminism did not

pay any attention to the needs of particular communities and groups such as the case of women of colour.

Another point of contention between feminists and ecofeminists was vegetarianism or veganism which is still very much discussed among both groups. Universal Veganism is seen by some as imposing on women yet a new constraint and overlooking the traditions of many cultures as "a form of value imperialism or cultural chauvinism" (Gruen 333). However, many ecofeminists have answered to these critiques, such as Adams and Gruen, who define veganism as "a feminist methodology that carefully contextualizes gender, race, class, sexuality, and ethnicity" (24). Veganism is actually argued to be a mechanism to fight against patriarchy:

> There are important conceptual and material links between racism, classism, sexism, and speciesism; [...] cultural traditions often provide the institutional structures for male domination and thus are the appropriate targets of criticism; and [...] meat-eating itself is a form of patriarchal domination and by consuming animal bodies, women are implicitly supporting their own domination." (Gruen 334)

This question will be further developed in the second section of this dissertation, delving into the issue with examples from Baume's novel and additional theory.

Waldau cites some of the similarities and the connection between the forms of oppression exerted on women and animals and its causes, which is precisely what ecofeminism studies. Waldau (261), for instance, alludes to the fact that women (and children) were legally considered men's property (and we cannot obviate that some countries' legal systems still maintain this), much like nonhuman animals currently are. This meant that harming "property" was difficult to regulate and "since nonhuman animals remain property today, owners of nonhuman animals who abuse them often hide, as did 'owners' of women and children, behind legal protections afforded property owners" (261).

As Waldau indicates, in the last years, companion animals have begun to be included in protection orders "for spouses and partners leaving abusive relationships" (Dianna J. Gentry, qtd. in *Animal Studies: an Introduction* 263). Gentry argues about the importance of this legal measure with the evidence that exists of the use of violence against domestic animals by men as a means to control their partners. In 1995, Carol Adams already wrote about the relation between domestic violence and animal harm and concluded that "in patriarchy, animal victims, too, have becomes feminized" and how "men have power over women, (feminized) men, *and* (feminized) animals" (qtd. in Adams and Gruen 23). In addition to the connection between violence towards non-human and human animals, Adams argues about the importance of "caring about both" (22), which introduces one of the most important features of recent developments of ecofeminism and which will be largely employed in the analysis of the second part of the dissertation.

The Feminist Tradition of Eco-Caring

Arm in arm with the association of men with culture and women with nature, another gendered dualism is born, one that is going to separate reason from emotion, respectively. Women are thought to be emotional creatures, more in touch with nature than men and often compared to animals as lacking intellectual capacity. It is not unexpected that some animal rights advocates would use reason as the basis for animal rights movements "in an effort to legitimize concern for other animals within the tradition of analytic philosophy" (Adams and Gruen 30) and in order to avoid a connection "with 'womanish' sentiments" (Donovan 59). However, as Marti Kheel explains, the animal rights movement is "highly emotionally charged" and largely

composed by women who did not care about being called "animal lovers" and "sentimentalists" (45). As Kheel explains, it is important to admit "that we cannot even begin to talk about the issue of ethics unless we admit that we care" (48).

This is the reason why ecofeminists propose an ethic based on emotion and supported by reason; as Donovan and Adams posit "In general, the feminist care ethic thus has rejected abstract, rule-based principles in favour of situational, contextual ethics, allowing for a narrative understanding of the particulars of a situation or an issue" (2). Kheel believes that personal experience should be the way to be cognizant of "the full impact of our moral decisions" and she argues that what we may "think" about a matter "when we are physically removed from the direct impact of our moral decisions" could change because of how we "feel" about it once we experience it personally (49).

The ethic-of-care approach is referred to as empathy or compassion approach as well and as a matter of fact, for Deane Curtin, "compassion" is preferable as she defines it as "a developed moral capability whereas care or empathy are closer to the natural capacities that make compassion possible" (40). She makes a strong defence of compassion against more reason-oriented approaches which understand compassion as pity and falsely associate it to an excessive dependence on emotion, arguing that "we cannot control external events" and therefore we should only depend on ourselves (42). Once again emotion is rejected for the purpose of affirming reason as the only veritable approach, as if emotion and reason were not compatible and having one meant irrevocably excluding the other.

Consequently, women's forced separation from reason means that men have also been disconnected from nature and from emotion. Kheel holds that men, whichever it may be the reason (biology or environment) are more prone to violence that women (50) but as

Kate Sandilands defends, the "masculine separation from both human mother and Mother Earth [...] results in men's desire to subdue both human and Nature in a quest for individual potency and transcendence" (qtd. in "The Ethics and Aesthetics of Eco-caring: Contemporary Debates on Ecofeminism(s)" 5). To this, Brian Luke adds:

> The derogation of sympathies is typically done in gender-specific ways. Women's expressions of sympathetic concern are expected and tolerated, but they are not respected; rather, they are dismissed as female hysteria. Men, on the other hand, are typically not allowed to express such feelings. (146)

Even though many ecocritics have defended that we cannot speak for nature and non-human animals, ecofeminists such as Donovan advocate for the establishment of a dialogue with animals, by "listening to animals, paying emotional attention, taking seriously–*caring about*–what they are telling us" (361). As Donovan and Adams state, "The feminist ethic of care regards animals as individuals who do have feelings, who can communicate those feelings, and to whom therefore humans have moral obligations" (3).

The caring tradition was scorned as it "became associated (and also denigrated by this association with women" (Donovan and Adams 3); it centres on compassion but it also "shows how these connections have a cognitive or rational component" (Adams and Gruen 3) and analyses to which extent politics and economy contribute to the suffering of animals (Donovan and Adams 3).

This approach will be further touched upon in the second part of this dissertation; it is going to be explored as a central and necessary notion in order to analyse Baume's *A Line Made by Walking*.

Following one of ecocriticism's most basic principles, it is necessary to analyse these issues from a wide range of perspectives, not only from a disciplinary variety, but also

the variation in the different territories of the world, considering that each place is a different case on its own, even if there seem to be some elements shared worldwide.

> [...] Western American literature is not unique in its ecological perspective and that we need to recognize our kinship with nature-oriented writers in New England, in Canada, in Europe, in South and Central America, in Africa, in Australia, everywhere. Ecological issues are both regional and global. They transcend political boundaries. What is required is more interdisciplinary scholarship and more inter-regional scholarship of common issues. (Love 237)

We will be now focusing on the specific Irish case, studying the particularities of nature and ecocriticism in Ireland and in Irish literature.

II. Nature and Ecocriticism in Irish Literature

"The Isle of Woods" is said to be "one of the early names for Ireland", according to literary critic Tim Wenzell (7) and he goes on arguing that, as stated in the anonymous *Birds and All Things* (1900), "many place names in Ireland derived from the presence of forests, shrubs, groves, and species of trees, […]" and Ireland's is a history of "the loss of a country that retains only the memories of place name and the loss of an entire culture whose identity was achieved through this forested landscape" (8). Wenzell mentions the importance of the grove for early Irish culture as it was for the Celts "the spiritual center of their existence" (9). The deforestation of Ireland is particularly important and should be related to the connection of the Irish people with their early history and with their ancestors.

Many critics seem to coincide on the fact that ecocriticism has not engaged yet with Irish literature and, in general, with Irish cultural studies so far:

> Just as nature is being ignored in Ireland's rise to the top of the world's economies, so too has nature been ignored in the literature of Ireland's writers.

> Despite the large body of writing in Irish studies, particularly in the last fifteen years, very little of this writing has focused on Irish authors and their observations of the natural world. (Wenzell 3)

According to Flannery, the Irish landscape has been a focal point for critics only due to Ireland's "protracted history of colonialism" ("Ireland and Ecocriticism: An Introduction" 6), and in any case, ecocriticism has centred its attention mainly or rather merely on poetry (7).

The nineteenth century is considered one of the noteworthy dates for the separation of humans from nature, a result of a combination of issues including the Great Famine and the replacement of the Irish Language by English, symptom of the conflict between Ireland and England (Wenzell 51). Wenzell establishes the Famine as a factor that had left a deep psychological wound which manifested itself through the Irish landscape, and as Wenzell explains, "The empty landscape that remained became a living testament to these horrific memories" (51), which led to the escape of poets to the cities with a new political commitment (49) that had nothing to do with the Irish landscape, while "the land itself was forgotten and relegated to the Irish poor" (51). The loss of Gaelic in favour of English "almost completely alienated [the Irish] from the language of their culture and furthering their connection to the natural world" (51)

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century's "return to the roots of Irish culture" was "inexorably tied to Ireland's natural world" (Wenzell 56). This is known as the Irish literary revival or Celtic Twilight, a period in which:

> Faced with the absence of any substantive written history of their Celtic past, [the Irish] resorted to the fertile ground of imagination from which to paint the black canvas of the past and to draw from the rural existence of the present. For them, the rural landscape and the natural word of the present become a well from which to draw stories from the natural word of the past. (57)

Wenzell refers to Yeats as one of the most emblematic figures of this period and Yeats seems to see the rural landscape as "the soul of Ireland" (62). This is a time of rejection

of industrialisation as it had separated the Irish from nature (63) and in the particular case of Yeats, Christianity was also to blame for the alienation of the Irish people from the natural world (64)

Economic growth and progress in general come unfortunately hand in hand with negative outcomes for nature, it being the price we need to pay for our actions. It is another instance of the appropriation of a land to which we consider ourselves entitled, a land we sacrifice as if it were ours. It cannot be denied that we find justifiable the destruction of the environment if it means the advancement of a society without realising that endangering the Earth *is* a danger for everyone.

In this respect, Ireland is not an exception among the countries that have recurrently sacrificed nature in favour of economic growth. Wenzell actually establishes globalisation and capitalism as the new threat to Ireland and how "progress has manifested itself in a landscape that is quickly diminishing Ireland's natural world" (2). The Celtic Tiger entailed the amelioration of the Irish economy and the overall living conditions of the Irish and, at the same time, it meant the exploitation of the Irish landscape as a means to accomplish these goals (Flannery, "Ireland and Ecocriticism: An Introduction" 2).

There are currently in Ireland many issues that must be approached with urgency, one of the major problems being the urban sprawl. In his 2004 *Emerald Green: An Ecocritical Study of Irish Literature*, Wenzell blames the urban sprawl on the rising living prices in the cities, inciting the expansion of urbanisation and "threatening to undermine the rich natural history of Ireland and the rich legacy of nature literature from the beginning of Irish civilization" (1). Flannery refers to Tim Robinson's suspicion of the Irish's superficial concern for the Irish landscape, and how this concern falls on the

conservation of place names instead of the places themselves, citing the detachment of Irish people towards "any sense of duty or responsibility to their landscape of places, and the histories embedded within" ("Ireland and Ecocriticism: An Introduction" 6).

Flannery mentions local and global ecologies and the importance of separating them, prioritizing a local perspective in order to gain a global vision of environmental issues; in Flannery's words: "a reclamation of locality can form the basis of new critical and political positions on Ireland's relationship with global environmental politics" ("Ireland and Ecocriticism: An Introduction" 3).

It is within this economic and social context of Ireland that we are going to analyse Baume's novel.

Sara Baume's *A Line Made by Walking*

Baume's novel deals with the feeling of failure of an aspiring artist, Frankie, who escapes the city of Dublin in favour of a rural landscape in which her grandmother lived until her death. Frankie feels that returning to nature will help with her overcome her severe mental health problems and her feeling of 'sadness', as she calls it. After seeing numerous dead animals, she decides to start taking pictures of them in an attempt to reconnect with art. Throughout the process of taking pictures of all the dead animals she finds, she reflects on moral issues, questioning at times her approach to the series and the reasons behind her behaviour toward the animals. Baume provides us with glimpses into Frankie's childhood and her life in Dublin, and how her experiences paired with the relationship she maintains with her family, her grief after her grandmother's death, her

nostalgia and her depression have resulted in a breakdown. Frankie's knowledge of art allows her as well to make associations between any experience or any element of her life and works of art, which are often crucial to understand the character's mindset.

Each chapter of this story is named after the animal that the protagonist encounters and photographs, and each contains as well a picture of said dead nonhuman living beings. These pictures were originally taken by the author previous to the conception of this novel with the intention of turning them into paintings, as Baume said in an interview with Amy E. Elkins. Not all the editions of the book have used Baume's photographs, some have omitted them and some have displaced them to the beginning of each chapter. The version employed for this analysis displays the pictures at the same moment when Frankie finds the animal.

Analysis of *A Line Made by Walking*

Some elements of Baume's novel will be analysed according to certain ecocritical and ecofeminist concepts, and we shall reflect on issues such as wilderness, anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, the usage of animals in art, compassion, speciesism, veganism and the relation between the oppression exerted on women and on nonhuman animals.

Wilderness

Frankie has always wanted to own "a patch of personal wilderness", and she adds, "Of waist-high grass entwined with wild flowers through which I can prance; within which I

can lie down and disappear from sight" (48-9), and so she asks her father to prepare for her a place she can call "[her] wilderness" (56). Frankie's wilderness is a recurrent motif throughout the story as a symbol of peace and welfare for the protagonist. However, it could seem contradictory the ideas of owning wilderness, and even odder to create a wilderness, since wilderness is by definition, uncorrupted by human action. Frankie's wilderness is rather an artificial one, built with the intent of fulfilling the same effect that a 'natural' wilderness can have: "as a place for the reinvigoration of those tired of the moral and material pollution of the city" (Garrard 59). The protagonist's 'personal' state of wilderness at her grandmother's cabin is disturbed by the view of a nearby turbine which, according to her, looks "more like a thing that had been shot down from space than raised up from the earth" (15). The turbine projects the image of primitive nature being interrupted by an alien object that does not belong in Earth.

After finding a dead robin, Frankie admits that when she was a child she came to believe that this bird was her guardian angel and that she would confess to robins what she did not tell the priest. Now, seeing the corpse of the robin, she is convinced that they are the same bird, therefore she believes that her guardian angel is dead. The identification of birds with divine figures is not in any way new, especially in Irish poetry. According to Frankie, the bird used to sing to her and she would understand and answer back. When analysing the medieval poem *Duthracar a Maic De` bi`* whose translation is *A Hermit's Wish,* by Padraigín Ní Uallacháin, Tim Wenzell comments on the fact that the hermit of the poem was "nourished" by the different voices of the birds, emphasising his "ability to distinguish between these sounds as ordinary civilized men could never do" (11).

The similarities between Frankie's character and the figure of the hermit are worth noting; Frankie, burnt out from the urban life of Dublin, secludes herself in a rural

location in which she seldom has contact with any human individual. The hermit's ritual has been traditionally related to religion, and according to Wenzell, "From the early Christian perspective, the role of the hermit in his desire to retreat into the shrinking forests of Ireland was vital to an understanding of God" (10), this is a position in which worship to the Christian God and worship to the natural world were still compatible and even complementary, since many Christian monks experienced an encounter with God through a previous connection with nature (11).

The protagonist of Baume's novel is not interested in religion, she has not fled the city with the purpose of finding God, but she is seeking to have an experience that is alike to a sort of spiritual encounter. By retreating to her grandmother's bungalow, Frankie is trying to heal from the pernicious effects that living in the city have had on her mental health. As opposed to the early Christian hermits who were searching for a religious experience, the protagonist is trying to obtain relief from her sadness. Her expectations to get better can only be attributed to a possible rapprochement with nature; by distancing herself from the rest of the world she will be capable of unveiling herself without the pressures of society. Frankie's supposition is not erroneous; as a matter of fact, the connection between mental illness and an urban environment has already been proven and is currently well-known. Furthermore, there are studies that reveal that these issues affect women more frequently and, in particular, depression can be diagnosed more often in women at a young age (Kessler 6).

Some studies demonstrate that cities present a higher chance for mental illnesses and the inclusion of green areas in the cities entails an amelioration of the mental and overall wellbeing (Gruebner et al.). Frankie mentions a psychiatric hospital in the city that was "surrounded by tall trees and sloping lawns" and comparing it to the rooms she had been renting, she concludes that living in the hospital would probably be "peaceful and

pleasant in comparison" (105). This small green area around the city hospital resonates with the conclusions many studies have reached indicating the positive effects of viewing or being in contact with nature on mental health (van den Berg). Therefore, as I have mentioned, Frankie's assumption about the likelihood of nature alleviating her sadness and bettering her overall mental health is by no means farfetched. However, this supposition can be interpreted as Frankie's own idealisation of the rural, a widespread sentiment influenced by the pastoral tradition which is "a testament to our instinctive or mythic sense of ourselves as creatures of natural origins, those who must return periodically to the earth for the rootholds of sanity somehow denied us by civilization" (Love 231). But Frankie does not get better miraculously, for nature does not work the same way an antidepressant does and she herself actively continues to muse over death, taking these series of pictures of animal corpses.

In addition, Wenzell indicates that the result of these retreats into nature was the creation of poetry; in Wenzell's words, poetry was a response "to [the] respective solitudes" of the Christian monks (11) and he adds that solitude was the condition in which "the hermit poet [found] transcendence", although nature was still the prerequisite for their "special connection to God and His creation" (12). Baume's protagonist's response to both nature and her solitude is the creation of her photography series; this was one of her purposes, to renew her connection with art and to stop feeling like a failure.

Birds were seen as messengers of the divine by Irish poets (Wenzell 14) and according to Feehan "Birdsong in particular was the voice of nature" (qtd. in *Emerald Green: An Ecocritical Study of Irish Literature* 14). This is particularly relevant if we bear in mind that Frankie used to confess her sins to a robin whom she considered her "guardian angel". The communication that, according to Frankie, used to take place between them

would imply that she possessed a special ability that allowed her to understand the language of the robin. It is not the actual case because Frankie, as a child, was probably imagining the 'conversation', playing make-believe. In any case, the robin is dead, killed by the impact of a car and Baume's writing intends to contrast the image of the free bird alive and his violent death, an opposition between wilderness and the effects of the human species on it:

> Most of the time, it was too high up, too far behind, too obscured by surroundings to distinguish, but in the boughs of our dainty woodland, my guardian would always reveal itself.
>
> Today's robin has been thumped by a speeding windscreen launched into artificial flight, crash-landed. (10)

Frankie's desire to find and come to terms with her own human wilderness was interrupted by the image of the turbine, and her communication with the non-human animal world represented by the robin was also frustrated by the animal's death. Therefore, Baume seems to be representing the difficulties of going back to nature and of reconciling the human and nonhuman natural world, despite the welfare that such processes could have for our emotional and physical welfare.

Egocentrism vs. Ecocentrism

Right from the beginning, the author establishes a connection between her main character and nonhuman animals. Frankie, the protagonist, finds the dead robin and identifies the materialisation of his dead body with her state of mind and the circumstances of her own life; it is not she who discovers them, rather, they find her:

> Somehow, they always find me. Crouching in the cavernous ditches and hurling themselves under the wheels of my Fiesta. Toppling from the sky to land at my feet. And because my small world is coming apart in increments, it seems fitting that the creatures should be dying too. They are being killed with me; they are being killed for me. (2)

This is an instance of egocentrism in which Frankie believes that the natural world revolves around her by attributing to it her own personal situation and feelings; she feels terrible, therefore finding a dead nonhuman animal is a sign of her mood. We will see throughout the story examples of the human species affecting the natural world, but despite what the protagonist may believe, it is not her feelings that are causing the death of nonhuman animals as nature is not in always, simply or merely in harmony with her mood. She expresses her surprise at not being in the same wave length as the weather and the seasons: "Why do I feel as if I'm being killed when it's the season of renewal?", denying or, at least, ignoring in this way nature's independent agency.

What is important here is the robin, killed by human activity and left abandoned on the road. The manner in which Baume describes Frankie's perception of her role in these killings emphasises Frankie's initial egocentrism, blaming them instead of herself, and it exemplifies the way most people feel about road killings: we tend to blame the birds, the cats, the hedgehogs and so on, and consider that they are the ones that are where they should not be, without considering that we have invaded a space they were occupying and made it dangerous for them. Road killing is so frequent nowadays that it is expected and not shocking at all, even Frankie admits later on in the story that she was responsible for the death of a pigeon, and as Amanda Sperry points out, "The car, a powerful symbol of economic and technological progress, like other technologies, mediates our interaction with the animal kingdom" (52) and more appalling is the affirmation that "road kill has become [...] one of the dominant ways people encounter many species of animals" (Dennis Soron, qtd. in "Dennis O'Driscoll's Beef with the Celtic Tiger" (52), which turns out to be true in this story, as almost all the animals of the series are the result of road killings.

Frankie is a contradictory character who cannot help but create a connection with nature and project onto it her emotions, but at the same time she seems to be somewhat aware of nature's independence from humans. On the one hand, the anthropomorphism reflected on some passages show Frankie's egocentric view of the natural world. The most relevant example is a fallen tree that she connects with her grandmother's death, "I loved that tree because it had acknowledged the ending of my grandmother's [...] life by momentously uprooting itself" (4). Her grandmother's tree, as she calls it, will allows us to see her change towards a more ecocentric perspective later on. Despite Frankie's egocentrism, she also realises at times that nature is an entity which does not depend on the human species: "The tree which falls without any human hearing still falls, as the creatures who die without being found by a human still die" (8).

Apart from Frankie's perspective at the beginning of the novel, the author does not romanticise nature; the land is not presented as an idyllic and harmonious place. Therefore, the pastoral literary trope, a key concept for ecocriticism, does not apply in this case since, as Glen A. Love puts it, through the pastoral trope "The Green World becomes a highly stylized and simplified creation of the humanistic assumptions of the writer and his audience" (231). Baume's protagonist compares the sound of sneezing in the city with the bawling of calves that she can hear from the farm, and she definitely prefers the former; the narrator speaks of the sea in several instances throughout the novel and alludes to its greatness and but also to its dangers, "I think about how this wide openness is the view I love best, and yet, if I was out there, how quickly it would kill me" (208); and later on, when she finds peace in 'her wilderness', she immediately admits that it is boring. Therefore, the natural world portrayed in *A Line Made by Walking* shows Baume's advocacy for realistic representation, exposing the unpleasant facts of nature both as a result of its innate processes and the effects of human activity.

Throughout the novel, there are several instances of an attempt at a rejection or at least a questioning of an anthropocentric perspective of the natural world, and one of the most obvious evidence is Frankie's rejection of Christianity. Lynn White identifies Christianity as "the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen" and it certainly is. Christianity created a separation between men and nature, with men as the master and nature as a resource to be exploited by man (*King James Bible*, Gen. 1:26)

Furthermore, it would be more to accurate to classify it as the most androcentric religion. While in Genesis 1:28 both men and women are included as the masters of nature, there are many other instances of the severe division Christianity established between man and woman. As a matter of fact, in the Bible, God creates Eve from and for Adam with the purpose of giving him a companion, a tool to impede man's solitude (Gen. 2:18). Throughout the Bible, women are taught to be silent, and obedient to their husband's wishes and it seems of importance to keep in mind the association of women and nature seen in the previous section of this dissertation, as not only are menstruation and childbirth claimed to be unclean for a woman, but birthing a girl instead of a boy would make a woman impure for a longer period of time (Lev. 12:2-8, 15:19); rejecting these natural processes which can only take place because of women demonstrates once more Christianity's link between the censure of women and its disconnection from nature.

In the novel, Jink, Frankie's neighbour, tries to convert her and she notices immediately after that interaction that there is a bird in a small cage in Jink's house:

> It's a cage with a budgie inside. Its feathers are terrifically pale; whiter that I believed I budgie could be. How odd that I haven't noticed it until now. Its talons are wrapped around a bar. It glowers into a tiny mirror. But as I pull the living room door open, the breeze upsets the budgie and he starts to hop. From ornament to ornament, to bar, to ornament again. (96)

Birds in general have always carried a lot of symbolism within Christian lore; for example, the dove was associated to the Holy Spirit. Why is it, then, that a believer of the Christian dogma would not have any reservations about caging a real bird? We respect animals for what they mean to the human species, not for what they are independently from us; we prioritise the symbol over the animal's reality behind it. As Waldau indicates, Animal Studies ought to pay more attention to the biological animals since focusing on the study of the symbol has "allowed human-centered inquiries, such as symbolic value, to push any inquiry about other animals' realities to the margins" (133). Therefore, if we look at the previously quoted passage, the symbolism behind the image of the Christian's caged bird, although not unimportant, should be superseded by the realisation of the cruelty of having these animals jailed.

In the fourth chapter of the novel, Frankie, inebriated and listening to a nun speaking in a television documentary, experiences a sudden rage at the nun when the latter attributes to God the merit of the beauty of nature and declares that they will pray for people with the intention of aiding them:

> 'BOLLOCKS TO GOD!' I yell at the telly 'THAT WAS THE MAGNIFICENCE OF NATURE!'
>
> [...]
>
> 'PRAYING IS AS USELESS AS DOING NOTHING AT ALL. PRAYING IS WORSE THAN DOING NOTHING AT ALL BECAUSE YOU ARE PRETENDING TO DO SOMETHING' (125-6)

In this passage, Frankie aggressively expresses an ecocentric point of view and complains about the inefficacity of the nuns' attempts to help; it is possible to see a parallelism between the nuns' intention and some environmentalists mentioned several times in the story who do nothing but complain, and Baume appears to be manifesting her opposition to the hypocrisy of both situations.

There are several allusions to animals as possessing souls, thus indicating that Baume rejects the conception of the soul as an exclusively human characteristic. According to Garrard, one of the arguments in favour of the separation of humans from nature is the former's possession of an immortal soul, which the latter lacks (26). It is another indication of Frankie's rejection of the Catholic tradition, predominant in Ireland, as it supports the notion of souls being restricted to the human species. It is a critique on the human-centeredness of the Western tradition, as opposed to the beliefs of Eastern non-anthropocentric religions. The nonhuman animals' spirits are of particular relevance in relation to Frankie's ideas about art.

Art in *A Line Made by Walking*

The narrator repeatedly admits that she believes taking pictures of the perished animals means stealing their "spirit", their soul, which is, as Frankie states, a belief shared by some traditions. Whether we share or not her opinion on the matter, when she affirms this and still proceeds with her series, we ought to be critical with her behaviour for it could be interpreted as a dismissal of the wellbeing of these living beings.

Frankie, when testing herself on her knowledge of art, remembers a piece of conceptual art about a goldfish: Marco Evaristti's installation which allowed people from the audience to decide on the fates of the goldfishes, whether to let them live or to kill them with a food blender by pressing a button. Frankie explains that, because of the controversy, Evaristti replaced the living animals by goldfishes already dead, as she suggests, "goldfish killed in a private place, by some other means" (82). In another test she remembers Hermann Nitsch's *Orgien Mysterien Theater*, a performance that involved the corpses and organs of animals.

The practice of transforming living beings into objects is unfortunately not infrequent in art, to which Betty and Theodore Roszak add that "Art as well as science and technology harbours the illusion that we *live outside or above* the natural world, and so may treat it as we please, turning it into an object of exploitation for the exclusive benefit of our species" (223). Frankie herself is guilty of doing the same. She chances upon a fox whose head is trapped in a tin can and she is incapable of helping as the animal escapes; however, when the fox appears dead on the road, hit by a car, she removes the tin can and proceeds to manipulate the body in order to take the picture. She displays an abundant amount of nonchalance if we take into account the fact that she always leaves the bodies where she finds them, even in the middle of the road, where cars will probably run over them repeatedly. Manipulating and using the animals' bodies for her own benefit and then leaving them once they stop being of interest is a sign of Frankie's apathy. Perhaps, some of the most shocking moments of the story are those in which Frankie confesses that she is hoping some animal will die for the sake of expanding her collection of pictures or, even graver, her vague thoughts about "[considering] accelerating" if she passes by some pigeons. Her treatment of the animals as mere tools to achieve her artistic aspirations is expressed in the text and we can see the parallelism between artists such as Evaristti and Frankie.

Waldau identifies these practices as "arts traditions that share something of the dismissive spirit of economics-driven industries" (127). Nonetheless, Waldau expresses also a different opinion on the purpose and the necessity of art as a link to the natural world:

> The arts are capable of focusing on encounters with other animals as individuals [...] Individualized artworks [...] provide novel perspectives that can prompt humans to focus afresh on subjects that have been marginalized. In effect, any focus on marginalized subjects demands that we think outside the box, that is,

> think outside inherited paradigms, such as human-centeredness. In this, the arts can prompt a kind of self-awareness through critical thinking. (128)

Were Frankie to expose these pictures in an art gallery, what is the effect they would have on the audience? They could be seen as a reflection of the consequences our actions have on the natural world, and how our actions are leaving behind the corpses of our victims, without a care or remorse. Were Frankie to publish these pictures, would they, as Waldau believes, redirect our attention to these "marginalized subjects" and to reconsider our position in the world? Frankie states that her project could manifest "the immense poignancy of how, in the course of ordinary life, we only get to look closely at the sublime once it has dropped into the ditch" (127), but this interpretation would be problematic as, in the first place, the animals behind the pictures would lose the focus of attention, and secondly, they would serve as mere symbols. The denunciation of their realities, their suffering and their oppression by mankind would be lost in this interpretation.

The Feminist Tradition of Eco-Caring

Frankie is acutely aware of the many issues that affect the natural world, such as the exploitation of nature for economic benefit, deforestation, animals used as research subjects or killed for their fur, pollution, and so forth, and while she seems critical, she barely does anything to help, not even reduce her own impact on the world, for, as she declares "right at that moment, I did not – could not – care a shit about recycling" (33). When she says that she "could not", we understand that she refers to her mental illness and how her sadness and apathy are enough to make her indifferent to the consequences of her actions. It would explain why Frankie's behaviour is not consistent throughout

the novel; Baume's character is at times insensitive, apathetic to the fates that have suffered these animals she photographs.

After a conversation with a psychologist in which she makes a racist comment towards her doctor, Frankie is unsettled, and even though she tries to find a justification for her behaviour ("I am mentally ill: Properly, officially. And cannot be held responsible for my actions, my words"), she is still panicked –"My heart is racing, my mind. My hands are shaking, my vision" (138)– and it is in this context that she finds the fifth animal of her project, a rook hit by a car, but still alive. As soon as she realises that the rook has not died yet, she enters her car, and waits. Her reaction shows indifference, waiting for the death of the rook so that she can take her picture, and it strongly opposes the engaged (albeit reluctant) conduct she will later show with a sparrow. At this point, the narrator does not appear to care about the animal, "I just want my picture and to be gone", or even about staying loyal to the rules of the project, as she is not entirely sure of the rook's death, but the animal is "still enough", thus she yields and takes the picture (141).

Later on, however, Frankie confesses: "I should know better than to help. I think of the whales, and all of the wounded creatures I tried to rescue in childhood. I can't remember a single one that survived" (Baume 248). Frankie admits that when she was a child, she always tried to save the animals she met, and later she had to bury them in flower beds when she failed to do it. Her attitude shows defeat for she seems to be overcome by the crushing loss and disappointment of her incapability to save these animals. Yet, when she happens upon another one, a sparrow she finds on the road that "[had] somehow managed to become fused to the melted tar of the freshly filled pothole" (248), she takes him (the protagonist identifies the sparrow as male) to her grandmother's house. As she is trying to remove the tar off the feathers, she realises the

futility of her endeavours and must finally take the difficult decision of killing the sparrow. Immediately after, she begins to cry. Her taking the sparrow's life is not an act of cruelty, but of compassion.

Despite Frankie's obsession with following the natural course of life, she puts the sparrow out of his misery when she understands that he cannot be saved and delaying his death means delaying his suffering. Some moral questions might be raised about the righteousness of her decision, about whether it was hers to make or not. There is not any difference between this and a pet's euthanasia due to an incurable and painful illness and as Donovan and Adams hold, "It is wrong to harm sentient creatures unless overriding good will result *for them*" (4). Ultimately, whether it is the wrong or right decision, Frankie shows compassion and acts accordingly to what she believes is the best for the sparrow.

With regards to the concerns that some ecocritics have manifested about visual exposure to animal cruelty as a denunciation in pictures and videos, Adams and Gruen posit that "Labeled as 'bleeding Jesus' pictures by some, encountering such representations can be very upsetting. [...] [Some] know that these representations have been effective in motivating people. [...] [Some] know that these representations have also paralyzed people, and desensitized them" (28). Is this, paired with her depression, an explanation for her displays of distant attitude? It is particularly relevant to bear in mind what Paul Waldau indicates, that "apathy regarding human cruelty to nonhumans can result in an increase in the overall level of cruelty" (262). Frankie seems to be aware of her detachment to the lives of the animals she uses for her photography and the possible effects it may be causing on her because when she hears the news about an abandoned baby being rescued by a man passing by, she cannot help but wonder whether she would have done the same, or whether she would have proceeded as with the animals,

take a picture and leave. It seems that the author wants us to reflect on the difference between our attitudes towards animals and towards other humans, and how the level of empathy showed in each case differs. Adams presents the following hierarchy based on the gradation of "barriers to violence" (27-8):

Humans
Subhumans
The devil
Primates other than humans
Mammals other than primates
    Predators
        Top carnivores
        Carnivores
    Prey (herbivores: four-legged, two-legged)
    "Vermin" (rats, mice)
Reptiles (snakes)
Insects ("pests")
    Spiders
    Cockroaches
    Ants
"Material" nature; Earth, "dirt"

This hierarchy introduces us into the topic of speciesism, and instances of it can be found in the story. The reasoning behind the animals' pictures is sound as the rules established that pets could not be included in the project and neither were permitted animals killed by the character, but, then, it seems interesting the absence of pictures of insects? The narrator has surely found dead insects more frequently that she did other animals. It is an assumption, but the probability of finding a dead beetle or spider must be higher than the probability of finding a rat, a fox, a frog, etc. As Adams points out in

relation to the mentioned hierarchy, that insects are considered 'pests' is the reason behind the uncaring extermination of insects to which no one bats an eye.

Frankie has certain interests and attitudes that are supported in men and discouraged in women for not being 'feminine' enough, for instance, keeping animals in cages is taken as an example of a more 'masculine' type of activity, as are considered fishing, hunting, bullfighting and so on, whose common bond is the cruelty exerted on animals. The following passage shows the dualism that connects women with emotion seen in the first section of the dissertation:

> I was not supposed to be one of those people who cry easily; [...] with a bedroom full of caged animals, and in college I learned to use all the big electric drills and wood-saws in the sculpture department and to weld. I've never been a crier and I've always prided myself on this (25)

which demonstrates that being cruel to animals is associated with absence of emotion. This passage defends the relation that seems to exist between man and the trained lack of compassion and emotion which are vital to the fair treatment of animals.

Nevertheless, Frankie's seemingly apathetic attitude regarding the caged animals can be attributed to her young age and to a behaviour learned from home, and more specifically, from her father. This assumption is supported by a passage from the second chapter of the novel, when Frankie finds the second animal of her project, a rabbit, and she assumes that "my father spotted it chewing the tulips and clouted its skull with the butt of his shears" (57). And she adds, "A single, clean blow. Every year, rabbits raid his lettuce bed, nibble down his baby leeks rummage up his daffodil bulbs", which suggests that this rabbit has not been his first victim and that it happens repeatedly, "every year", often enough that he has developed a technique that allows him to murder a nonhuman animal without making a mess. Furthermore, rabbits are not the only species he kills, "Peter and Roger and Thumper and Bugs are vermin to my father, as

are the slugs he pellet-poisons, as are the pigeons he shoots and nails to a timber post alongside his vegetable patch as a warning to other pigeons" (57-8). She has been raised by a person who does not seem to have any qualms about hurting and killing animals, and going as far as to display the pigeons' bodies in order to scare the others from coming to his garden. These animals are merely trying to feed themselves, and yet they are treated like a plague, as if they were invading a land that is his alone. Such upbringing, that is, seeing one's progenitor treat animals without any regard, any consideration for their lives and with significant frequency can have a desensitising effect on children, making them learn and naturalise these behaviours. Waldau emphasises the importance of assimilating the opposite attitude from a young age:

> if one fosters caring abilities in a child early and often, then the child stands a much better chance of actualizing these abilities throughout life. The converse applies, too –retard caring about others early, and the child is at risk of losing such abilities for life. (77)

Frankie does not inflict in any case conscious violence towards any animal that she may find, which would indicate that despite her fathers' influence, she has not interiorised his cruelty. But his lack of empathy with nonhuman animals turns into a lack of understanding towards Frankie herself; Baume presents him as a father not attuned at all to his daughter's emotions and needs, "And my father, of course, he did not even notice" (88). There is a clear contrast with Frankie's mother, who always knows what her daughter is trying to say and how she is feeling. Her mother is depicted as a much more empathetic and compassionate person, "[she] worries on behalf of others when she feels they are not worrying adequately for themselves" (241).

Frequent are the instances in which there is disconnection in the communication between fathers and daughters, and even brothers and sisters, for, as Estévez-Saá and Lorenzo-Modia explain, this situation is the result of "the effects of a sexually

differentiated personality or consciousness-formation that separates girls, who experience a continuum between self and mother, and boys, whose identity is constructed opposition-ally" (4). The contrast between Frankie's parents is an example of the feminisation of emotional and compassion displays which are discouraged and even intolerable in men.

Veganism

Cruel and compassion-lacking actions, similar to those carried out by Frankie's father, are not uncommon in rural areas, and not only for the sake of 'protecting' our yards or our food, but also with the intent of feeding ourselves. Chickens, calves, rabbits, pigs, and so forth, these are some of the most frequent animals killed in the country with the purpose of becoming food for humans and some of those inhabiting these areas often become used to witnessing these gory scenes of slaughter since childhood. However, this does not indicate that not experiencing for themselves these cruel killings, as is common for people from cities and urban areas in general, means that they unconsciously develop a higher degree of compassion for nonhuman animals. If it were that uncomplicated, people would simply not engage in practices such as meat consumption, but the "universalization of a Western diet high in meat and dairy" (Twine 195) combined with the strategy of turning "nonhuman subjects into nonhuman objects" (Adams "The War on Compassion" 23) guarantees the impassiveness of meat consumers. Moreover, Marti Kheel explains the result of not experiencing ourselves the consequences that maintaining these sort of diets have on animals:

> If we *think*, for example, that there is nothing morally wrong with eating meat, we ought, perhaps, to visit a factory farm or slaughterhouse to see if we still *feel* the same way. If we, ourselves, do not want to witness, let alone participate in,

> the slaughter of the animals we eat, we ought, perhaps, to question the morality of indirectly paying someone else to do this on our behalf. When we are physically removed from the direct impact of our moral decisions–that is, when we cannot see, smell, or hear their results–we deprive ourselves of important sensory stimuli, which may be important in guiding us in our ethical choices. (49)

Simultaneously being against animal cruelty and consuming meat is a common attitude; a great number of people who argue against bullfighting, hunting, animal fighting rings are not necessarily vegetarian nor vegan. This is the case of Frankie, for there are passages in which she eats meat and there is not any indication of her remorse or doubts. Frankie shows compassion and remorse in some of her encounters with animals, yet she does not mention the same sentiment when eating meat, and it is related to the different perceptions she has of the animals; those she photographs and meets personally are seen as individuals, while those she eats are just 'meat', as Adams posits, the term 'meat' has been turned into a mass term:

> Objects referred to by mass terms have no individuality, no uniqueness, no specificity, no particularity. When humans turn a nonhuman into "meat", someone who has a very particular, situated life, a unique being, is converted into something that has no individuality, no uniqueness, no specificity. When five pounds of meat-balls are added to a plate of meatballs, it is more of the same thing; nothing is changed. But taking a living cow, then killing and butchering that cow, and finally grinding up her flesh does not add a mass term to a mass term and result in more of the same. It destroys a life. (33)

Therefore, by means of detachment from the individual, we stop taking into consideration and caring for the animals that are killed to become our food. The animals Frankie eats are as unique as those she photographs, as her grandmother's dog, as the sparrow she kills to stop his pain, etc., so there should be no difference for Frankie, but there is, because as Adams explains, "The more of a mass term they become, the less concern they need provoke" (25). However, Adams concludes that farmed animals "die as individual –as a cow, not as beef; as a pig, not as pork. Each suffers his or her own death, and this death matters a great deal to the one who is dying." (25-6).

Interlocking Oppressions

There are some passages that reflect the connection between the treatment of animals and the treatment of nonhuman animals. For instance, we have seen how Frankie's father's apathy towards the rabbits, the snails and the pigeons translates into an absence of sensitivity towards her daughter's state of mind and emotions. But perhaps the most significant indication of the "interlocking oppressions" can be seen in the last chapter, in which Frankie confesses the real cause of her breakdown.

At the beginning of the novel, she states that the reason she fell apart in her bedsit was that she was triggered by a documentary, Werner Herzog's *Encounters at the End of the World*, which addresses both lone penguins separating from their colony and people going to the South Pole because they feel as if they do not have a place elsewhere. However, she is marked by the deranged penguin, whose behaviour is yet to be explained. There are obvious similarities between the penguin and the self-banished humans, as we are describing two similar situations in which both the penguins and the humans reject their respective groups and move away, to places with harsher living conditions.

However, in the last chapter, Frankie confesses that the deranged penguin was not the real reason behind her breakdown; before even watching the documentary, she meets and speaks with a man in a park, and after parting with him, she realises that she put herself in a vulnerable position by telling the stranger where she lived. She began to feel anguish and paranoia at knowing that the stranger could be watching her or could even hurt her. Nothing happens and the stranger never appears, but she experienced the fear that seems to come hand in hand with being a woman. Frankie is aware of the reality in which she lives, where women are more vulnerable to being hurt because of their

gender. She is as conscious of this fact as she is of the exploitation of nature or the violence inflicted on nonhuman animals:

> I have only wanted to believe it was the deranged penguin because this is a better reason for being inconsolable, a so-much-more interesting and complicated and quixotic thing to be disturbed by than the banal reality. Than attack, rape, murder. I have only wanted to believe it was the deranged penguin so I can consequently believe it is possible for me to be driven mad by concern for some creature other than myself. (295)

Baume is presenting a reality in which we can see the parallelism between men hurting women and men hurting animals. The majority of oppression practices exerted on nature are either neutral or male gendered: her father and the rabbit, her Christian neighbour and the caged bird, the farmer she remembers from childhood and the crows he used to hang alive, the Brazilian men hired to work at meat factories and in daffodil farms, the hunters she used to oppose as a child, and so forth. But Baume also presents men as oppressive and as a threat for women; for instance, when Jehovah Witnesses arrive to her grandmother's house she holds in doubt whether they are there to hurt her: "now I remember to wonder if they are robbers, or rapists, or murderers [...] and I realise it would be very stupid to invite them in so they can see for themselves there's no garda here" (229). There is another instance in which Frankie refers to men being agents of violence and oppression: "*There are women and children in a central African country nobody's ever heard of and they are being raped and slaughtered by their countrymen"* (24). Frankie, after feeling the potential danger of her situation, makes a connection with the penguins as she proceeds to do exactly the same thing they did: banish herself from the city and start wandering without a purpose.

Frankie's Line Made by Walking

After killing the sparrow, Frankie decides that she must begin to fix things; she leaves her grandmother's bungalow and in a break taken during her trip by bus, she finds a dead badger, the last animal of her collection, and this time, she lies down beside them while she takes the pictures, as "A final showdown of concern for a creature other than myself" (297).

Baume shows a clear contrast between the beginning of the story and the ending, indicating Frankie's growth and change of perspective in which she no longer considers herself to be the centre of her environment. At first, Frankie identified the fall of a tree with the death of her grandmother, as an act of empathy for her passing but with the last work of art on which she tests herself, we see a change:

> Works about Trees, I test myself, the final test, I promise. Joseph Beuys, *7000 Oaks.* The first planted in Kassel in 1982. The mission to plant seven thousand, each coupled with a basalt standing stone, four foot high. A symbolic beginning, predetermined to continue through time, across continents. And so it did, does. Italy, America, England, Ireland, Norway, Australia. After Beuys had stopped planting them for himself, after he died.
>
> The oaks which grow. The stones which don't. (298)

This time she acknowledges nature's agency (Wilson 68), she seems to be aware of the fact that the natural world exists with independence from the human species; it is not something to which we are entitled and its function and raison d'être is not simply or merely to reflect our emotions, our mindset or the circumstances of our lives.

The title of the novel was taken from artist Richard Long's piece of art, which represents a picture of a field with a line created by him walking from one point to another. On the one hand, we can relate it to the impact our actions have in the natural world, but as Long states in relation to his piece in an interview with Charlotte Higgins,

“A work of art can be a journey”. And if that is the case, then Frankie’s unending physical journey but also her journey towards a more ecocentric and conscious perspective is the ultimate work of art.

Conclusions

Frankie's series of pictures of dead animals may not be directed to exclusively address the impact of our action on them, but Baume's narration *does* make us reflect on it with, not only the countless examples of the exploitation of natural resources and animal abuse provided on the novel, but also through Frankie's apathy which produces some of the most shocking passages of the novel, as her indifference toward the rook or the admission of wanting animals to die for the sake of her collection. In order to defend nature and transmit her understanding of the issues that afflict it, Baume does not need to resort to its idealisation because nature is not what the pastoral tradition makes it out to be. As Frankie seems to learn along her stay in her grandmother's bungalow, the natural world is an entity that does not need us to exist and it is definitely not what we project onto it.

As I have exposed, Frankie's stance of both awareness of environmental issues and apathy is a reflection of the most harmful position that can be adopted, since as bad as ignorance may be, indifference is even worse for it is the admission that we do not care. *A Line Made by Walking* invites us to reconsider our role in the abuse of nature and nonhuman animals and whether the reasoning behind our actions might be motivated by the misconception that certain species of nonhuman animals are inferior to others, and thus, that they do not deserve neither respect nor compassion.

Baume presents a contrast between the male and female characters of the novel in regards to the oppression and abuse the former exert on nature, animals and women alike, thus supporting one of the ecofeminist principles which exposes the harming effects of androcentrism on all non white male heterosexual human beings. *A Line*

Made by Walking admits many different readings and approaches and, for example, the intersection between violence against nonhuman animals and women is not the only connection the text bears that can be established from an ecofeminist perspective; there are other groups being discriminated in the story as we see instances of racism and ableism.

Finally, regarding the disparity in the treatment of animals that are considered 'individuals' and those that suffer a "massification" (Adams 25) and are turned into objects to be consumed, the necessity of emphasising on the question of speciesism and universal veganism becomes obvious. Concerning this notion, most ecofeminists advocate for the liberation of all beings as compulsory for the liberation of women.

Irish literature is currently suffering a renewal of the canon, which combines both a shift and an expansion of the topics addressed and the increasing number of women entering or already leading the Irish literary scene. This transformation is partially a result of the Irish economic crisis that followed the Celtic Tiger, because as Irish writer Anne Enright declared when interviewed by Justine Jordan, "The glorious old-fashioned thing that you can't get a job, you might as well write, has always applied in Ireland". Baume herself corroborates Enright's statement in an interview with Patricia Nicol, admitting that she allowed herself to pursue her artistic aspirations since being unemployed stopped being shameful during the crisis.

The increase of female voices in literature assures the introduction and the treatment of issues that concern and oppress women, and as Enright affirms "Traditionally, Irish writing has been about breaking silences. The biggest silence has continued to be about the real lives of women". A canon constituted by diverse subjects and authors, not only by female writers, but also by authors from other historically silenced groups,

contributes to a fairer handling of the matters that concern and affect them, influencing their readers to reflect on them and reconsider their own perspective.

It is of paramount importance that literature brings into focus the exploitation of the natural world, and also of all its creatures and the issues that afflict them, such as sexism, racism, homophobia, speciesism and ableism, so as to shift from the current androcentric tradition to a philosophy based on compassion and the fair treatment of all beings.

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